

Stress in America 2020 survey reveals mental health of young adults as most at risk

30 October 2020, by Erin Karter



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Stress from COVID-19—along with stress related to health care, the economy, racism and the presidential election—is seriously threatening the mental health of our country, particularly our youngest generation, according to a new national survey from the American Psychological Association (APA).

The potential long-term consequences of the persistent stress and trauma created by the pandemic are particularly serious for our country's youngest individuals, known as Generation Z. The 2020 APA survey shows that teens (ages 13-17) and young adults (ages 18-23) are facing unprecedented uncertainty, experiencing elevated stress and are already reporting symptoms of depression.

"Loneliness and uncertainty about the future are major stressors for adolescents and young adults who are striving to find their places in the world, both socially, and in terms of education and work," said Emma Adam, a developmental psychobiologist in the School of Education and

Social Policy at Northwestern, who led the design and collection of the teen data for the report.

"The pandemic and its [economic consequences](#) are upending youths' social lives and their visions for their futures. We must work to provide social, emotional and mental health supports to this generation, while providing much-needed financial assistance and educational and [work opportunities](#) for youth. Both comfort now and hope for the future are essential for the long-term well-being of this generation," Adam said.

While older Americans may be able to embrace the feeling of "this, too, shall pass," young adults are at a pivotal moment in their lives and are experiencing adulthood at a time when the future looks uncertain.

The survey also indicates most Americans are not getting the support they need. The majority of adults (61%) say they could have used more [emotional support](#) than they received over the prior 12 months, with more than eight in 10 Gen Z adults (82%) saying the same.

Adam helped create recommendations to support young people struggling to cope, including economic, training and work supports and mental health services, including increased telehealth options and enriched school mental health services.

How to Support Gen Z

- Create meaningful opportunities for connections with family, culture and community. Although many have left home physically, these connections remain fundamental to youth well-being.
- Create traditions for Gen Z that celebrate

milestones in new ways. They can be the generation that reinvents society by creating new celebrations and traditions that are meaningful.

- Facilitate access to mental [health](#) services during and after the pandemic. This can include telehealth services, interstate psychological services and increasing funding to better support [mental health services](#) provided within schools when this is over.
- Provide educational, work, training and employment opportunities specifically targeted at supporting this generation of [young adults](#). They need to see a possible path forward for themselves.
- Thank our youngest generation for the sacrifices they've made for the greater good. This includes social involvement that is critical to their development, milestones such as graduations and proms, and even their education. We should acknowledge what they and many others are doing to keep us safe.

More information: Stress in America 2020:

[www.apa.org/news/press/release ... al-health-crisis.pdf](http://www.apa.org/news/press/release...al-health-crisis.pdf)

Provided by Northwestern University

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